From biographies of scientific objects to global narratives in Swiss museums

Dr. Tomás Bartoletti
tomas.bartoletti@gmw.gess.ethz.ch


Wednesday 15-17 hrs.
IFW A 34
Abstract

This seminar will reflect on contemporary trends in the history of knowledge and its study of material culture. The focus will be placed on scientific objects and their “biographies” as a means for constructing the history of science. It involves the understanding of knowledge networks on a global scale and the establishment of museums and collections as “cathedrals of science.” This seminar on biographies of scientific objects and global narratives aims to research critically epistemic and (post-)colonial entanglements and the centre-periphery dynamics in the history of knowledge from other perspectives, like the materiality turn, animal studies and questions of human-non-human agencies. Methodologically, the course proposes to do fieldwork in Swiss museums, collections and storage facilities where this issue can be examined today.

Requirements

- Regular attendance and active participation (minimum:80% recommended)
- Regular reading of mandatory texts and fulfillment of 2-3 assignments during semester
- Submit a term paper at the end of semester


Technical Support: rahel.gutmann@gmw.gess.ethz.ch

Storage in Historisches Museum. Foto: Tomás Bartoletti
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 Sept</td>
<td>Welcome, Introduction, Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Sept</td>
<td>Ethnographying Eurocentrism:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visit to Rietberg Museum “The Question of Provenance. Unwrapping Collection History”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have a look: <a href="https://rietberg.ch/en/exhibitions/questionofprovenance#/">https://rietberg.ch/en/exhibitions/questionofprovenance#/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Watch this film ('30): Les statues meurent aussi (Statues Also Die), directed by Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, and Ghislain Cloquet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzFeuiZKHcg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzFeuiZKHcg</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Oct</td>
<td>Theories &amp; Concepts I: Possessing Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From Cabinets of Curiosities to Cathedrals of Science (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Further readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MacGregor, A., Curiosity and Enlightenment: Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century (New Haven, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Oct</td>
<td>Theories &amp; Concepts II: Biographies of Objects and Scientific Boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local and global, particular and universal (?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further readings

16 Oct

**Ethnographying the Breathless Zoo:**


Further readings

Colonel Roosevelt and the first jaguar
*From a photograph by Kermit Roosevelt*
### 23 Oct

**White Hunter-collectors: the Empire of Nature**


**Further readings**


### 30 Oct

**Sciences of Man and Dark Trophies**


**Further readings**

Brace, Loring. “*Race* is a four letter word. The Genesis of the Concept.” Oxford University Press.


### 6 Nov

**Politics of Display**

Further readings
Thorsen, Liv; Rader, Karen; Dodd Adam (eds.). 2013. *Animals on Display. The Creaturely in Museums, Zoos, and Natural History*. Peen State University Press.

13 Nov

**Ethnographying (Pre)Humans:**

Visit to *Museum of Anthropology, UZH*:


Assignment to be announced

![Anne and Bernard Spitzer Hall of Human Origins, American Museum of Natural History](image)

20 Nov

**Laboratories of Governmentality**


Further readings


---

**27 Nov**

**The Question of Provenance and Repatriation, revisited**


Further readings


---

**4 Dec**

**Museums of tomorrow: dialogue of experts, knowledge exchange, indigenous epistemologies, ontological turn, intangible heritage, cultural properties, etc, etc, etc…**

Have a look to Völkerkundemuseum UZH: [https://www.musethno.uzh.ch/en.html](https://www.musethno.uzh.ch/en.html)

Exhibition *Trinkkultur – Kultgetränk*:

[https://www.musethno.uzh.ch/de/ausstellungen/archiv/trinkkultur.html](https://www.musethno.uzh.ch/de/ausstellungen/archiv/trinkkultur.html)

Assignment to be announced

---

**11 Dec**

**Ethnographying Helvetians:**

Visit to *Landesmuseum Zürich*: [https://www.nationalmuseum.ch/e/zuerich/](https://www.nationalmuseum.ch/e/zuerich/)

Assignment to be announced

18 Dec  Final Discussion & Evaluation